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THE IRISH QUESTION:

HON. EDWARD BLAKE'S SPEECH

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

On Thursday, the 20th of April, 1882, a motion was made in the House of Commons for an Address to the Queen on the subject of Irish affairs. Hon. EDWARD BLAKE, leader of the Liberal party in Canada, made the following speech in the course of the debate:

Mr. BLAKE—If no other hon. member proposes to address the House on the subject, I do not, for my part, feel disposed to give a silent vote upon it. It is now two years ago since, in the course of a very important discussion here, I ventured to suggest in my place in Parliament that the accession to power, which had then recently taken place, of the Liberal Administration in England, would lead very shortly to the concession of some measure of Home Rule to the Irish people. I believe, as I said, that such a solution as could be obtained of the land question, such a solution as had been from time to time reached of other political questions, would, after all, not settle the Irish question, and that unless the dictates of prudence and of justice alike were observed and fulfilled by the granting to the Irish people of some measure of control over their local affairs, we would see that which has been the disgrace and the humiliation of the British Empire for many years still continued. I also stated, as the hon. gentleman in his speech and in his motion has observed, that we had one amongst many material interests here, in Canada, in the solution of that question, in the change which might be expected from it in the attitude of the great bulk of the Irish people towards the Empire, that we had a material—although I regard it as a much lesser interest than the interest which has been mainly discussed—we had a material interest of a serious character with reference to the chances and the opportunity of immigration to our soil, which will be impaired so long as the

present state of feeling shall continue. Now, I propose to justify the attitude which I took upon that occasion, and which did not then meet with any very animated response in the House or in the country; I propose to justify it by a reference to some obvious historical facts which it appears to me can lead to only one inevitable conclusion. In order that we may understand the ground upon which, as I conceive, some action in this direction is demonstrably necessary, it is by no means needful to go further back than to the time of the Union.

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It is not needful here to recur in detail to the more ancient events in connection with Irish history, to the history of the conquest, to the history of the confiscations, to the history of the proscriptions, to the history of the penal laws—directed at one time against Protestants, and at one time against Catholics—to the history of those penal laws, and of those events of the most serious and terrible description, laws and events to which I have briefly alluded, but which ought to make us all, when we recur to them, blush with shame, which have left marks of human error and of human crime almost indelible, and enhancing, there can be no doubt, even to-day, the difficulties of the situation. I say it is needless for the purposes of this discussion that we should revert to these matters in detail, for I am willing that this question should be tried not upon the previous events, but upon the history of the past eighty years, upon the history of the government of Ireland under the present constitution of the United Kingdom. That history begins with the Union Act—an Act secured, as we all know, by means of the basest bribery and corruption. However beneficial the public men who carried that measure may have believed it to be, I do not suppose it will be urged to-day that the end justified the means, and I have myself a strong belief that the nefarious means by which that measure was carried operated very largely to increase the difficulties of its working, and produced a state of feeling which gave it but a poor chance of being satisfactory to the people of the country which was by such means brought into more intimate connection with Great Britain. But, Sir, since that period, for a little more than eighty years has Ireland been managed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom; and I do not hesitate to say that

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has been a dreadful failure. There has been time enough to try the question out. Eighty years in the history of a country, and such an eighty years as Ireland has experienced, is surely time enough to try the question out. Now, let us apply some obvious, plain and palpable tests as to whether there has been a good and successful administration of Irish affairs under the

grievances too long maintained, to the attainment of rights too long denied, and so to enlarge the strength and increase the unity of the mighty Empire of which we form a part.

(On sitting down the hon. gentleman received an ovation of applause from both sides of the House.)

The following is the resolution moved by Mr. Costigan, to which Mr. Blake spoke:

That an humble Address be presented to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, in the following words:

Most Gracious Sovereign:

We, your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of Canada, in Parliament assembled, desire most earnestly, in our own name, and on behalf of the people whom we represent, to renew the expression of our unswerving loyalty and devotion to your Majesty's person and Government.

1. We have observed, may it please Your Majesty, with feelings of profound regret and concern, the distress and discontent which have prevailed for some time among Your Majesty's subjects in Ireland.

2. We would respectfully represent to Your Majesty that your Irish subjects in the Dominion of Canada are among the most loyal, most prosperous, and most contented of Your Majesty's subjects.

3. We would further respectfully represent to Your Majesty that the Dominion of Canada, while offering the greatest advantages and attractions for those of our fellow-subjects who may desire to make their homes amongst us, does not receive that proportion of emigrants from Ireland which might reasonably be expected, and that this is due, in a great measure, in the case of many of our Irish fellow-subjects who have sought foreign homes, to their feelings of estrangement towards the Imperial Government.

4. We would further most respectfully represent to Your Majesty that, in the interests of this your loyal Dominion and of the entire Empire, it is extremely to be desired that Your Majesty may not be deprived, in the development of Your Majesty's possessions on this continent, of the valuable aid of those of Your Majesty's Irish subjects who may feel disposed to leave their native land to seek more prosperous homes.

5. We desire respectfully to suggest to Your Majesty that Canada and its inhabitants have prospered exceedingly under a Federal system, allowing to each Province of the Dominion considerable powers of self-government, and would venture to express a hope that, if consistent with the integrity and well-being of the Empire, and if the rights and status of the minority are fully protected and secured, some means may be found of meeting the expressed desire of so many of your Irish subjects in that regard, so that Ireland may become a source of strength to Your Majesty's Empire, and that Your Majesty's Irish subjects at home and abroad may feel the same pride in the greatness of Your Majesty's Empire, the same veneration for the justice of Your Majesty's rule, and the same devotion to and affection for our common flag, as are now felt by all classes of Your Majesty's loyal subjects in this Dominion.

6. We would further express a hope that the time has come when Your Majesty's clemency may, without injury to the interests of the United Kingdom, be extended to those persons who are now imprisoned in Ireland charged with political offences only, and the inestimable blessing of personal liberty restored to them.

We pray that the blessings of Your Majesty's reign may, for your people's sake, be long continued.